

GULLAH AS A LITERARY DIALECT: PHONOLOGICAL AND MORPHOSYNTACTIC FEATURES IN 19th CENTURY WRITINGS. A CASE STUDY

Costin-Valentin Oancea*

Abstract: Starting from the 18th century, writers began using Gullah in different stories and plays, and speculated about its origins. Gullah is an American English-based creole spoken along the coast of Georgia, South Carolina and in the Sea Islands. It is also known as Sea Island Creole or Geechee. Several American writers have used this creole in their writings. This paper focuses on the way Edgar Allan Poe used Gullah as a literary dialect, in the short story *The Gold-Bug*, to render the speech of Jupiter, an old Negro slave. The first part of the paper presents phonological and morphosyntactic features that have been attested in Gullah. The second part of this study analyzes the phonological and morphosyntactic features found in the speech of Jupiter and attempts to demonstrate that Jupiter used the regional superstrate variety of Gullah, as expected from house servants. It will also be shown that Jupiter's speech also contains many features found in Gullah's sister variety, African American Vernacular English.

Keywords: Gullah, creole, literary dialect, phonology, Edgar Allan Poe, *The Gold-Bug*, eye dialect

1. Introduction

Gullah (also known as Sea Island Creole or Geechee) is an African American variety spoken along the coast of South Carolina and Georgia and Sea Islands. Its origin and development can be traced to the South Carolinian and Georgian coastal rice fields of the early 18th century. In 1670, the first British colonists and their African slaves settled in Charleston, from Barbados. Mufwene (2004: 357) notes that the earliest written attestations of Gullah appeared in William Gilmore Simms's *The Book of My Lady*, published in 1833. However, it seems that there were also reports in 18th century colonial newspapers of African slaves who spoke "broken" English.

The status of Gullah is still debatable in the literature, as there are several theories as to the genesis of Gullah and indirectly of its sister, African American Vernacular English (AAVE). One of the earliest accounts of Gullah is presented in Bennett (1908: 336):

In Gullah, intellectual indolence, or laziness, physical and mental, which shows itself in the shortening of words, the elision of syllables, and modification of every difficult enunciation, results in phrases so disguised that it is difficult at times to recognize them, or, at sight, to comprehend the process of their derivation, so great has been the sound-change and so complete the disintegration.

This claim was discarded by dialectologists who deemed it racist. This was later replaced by the Baby-Talk Hypothesis or Foreigner Talk Hypothesis which circulated up to the 1930s (Mufwene 1997, Weldon & Moody 2015). This hypothesis stated that pidgins and

* "Ovidius" University of Constanța, Department of Modern Languages and Communication Sciences, oancea_costin@yahoo.com.

creoles developed from child-like attempts by non-Europeans to speak European languages. Others, like Johnson (1930: 17) for instance, argued that Gullah was an English dialect, whose “grammar and phonology directly descended from the midland and southern English dialects.” Krapp (1924: 190) substitutes the Baby-Talk Hypothesis for the English Dialect Hypothesis. He posits that:

The Negro speaks English of the same kind and class for class, of the same degree as the English of the most authentic descendants of the first settlers in Jamestown and Plymouth.

The Negroes, indeed, in acquiring English have done their work so thoroughly, that they have retained not a trace of any African speech. Neither have they transferred anything of importance from their native tongues to the general language. A few words, such as *voodoo*, *hoodoo*, and *buckra*, may have come into English from some original African dialect, but most of the words commonly supposed to be of African origin, e.g. *tote*, *jazz*, and *mosey*, are really derived from ancient English or other European sources.

Turner’s seminal book *Africanisms in the Gullah Dialect*, published in 1949 was among the first works that highlighted the cultural and linguistic significance and heritage of this variety. Many researchers, following in Turner’s steps, suggested that “Gullah’s system was mainly African” (Dalby 1971, van Sertima 1976, Mufwene 2001). By doing so, they adhered to one of the strongest positions regarding the provenance of Gullah, the *African Substrate Hypothesis* (Dunn 1976, Mufwene 1997, Weldon & Moody 2015). One of the most widely accepted hypotheses today is that Gullah is a creole that developed throughout the period of Atlantic slave trade. In an attempt to explain the emergence of Gullah, Dillard (1972) referred to the West African Pidgin English (see also Avram 2005), which, he claimed, emerged out of the English trade, as speakers of the English superstrate (or lexifier) came into contact with speakers of different West African substrate languages. In such a contact situation, a pidgin would have emerged, due to the need of communication between Africans and their European masters.

According to Mufwene (1997: 114), Europeans settled in and populated the colonies in three stages. In the first stage, which lasted about ten to fifteen years, they lived in small homesteads and earned their living through farming and trading, while at the same time developed a technological infrastructure. In this first phase, the number of Europeans outnumbered that of non-Europeans. The Europeans mated with the non-Europeans, thus giving rise to a sizable creole population, with mulattoes, who spoke colonial varieties of the lexifier language.

The second stage was characterized by agriculture and mining and the number of non-Europeans increased to such extend that it outnumbered the Europeans. Due to segregation, plantation vernaculars appeared more and more different from the colonial varieties of the lexifiers spoken by the creole population. It is during this stage, Mufwene (1997: 115) contends, that the creole might have developed through a process of basilectalization of the vernaculars that emerged during the first stage.

The third stage was marked by the abolition of slavery, which was probably distinguished by some cross-plantation leveling of the creole, especially toward the end of

the 19th century. This seems to be the factor that may account for the regional uniformity of Gullah.

Jones-Jackson (1983: 291) clarifies some aspects about Gullah in order to differentiate it from the speech of other Black Americans. She argues that Gullah is not a synonym for “Black dialect”. Gullah is a creole language whereas inland Black speech is considered a dialect of English. She considered Gullah to be a language because the criterion of mutual intelligibility is not met, meaning that it is not mutually intelligible with English. Just like Turner (1949) and Mufwene (1997), Jones-Jackson also agrees that Gullah emerged from contact between English and other West African languages like Yoruba, Igbo, Efik, Twi, etc. Geographical isolation and social factors contributed to the preservation of Gullah, as these communities have had little contact with whites.

A very compelling claim is made by Stewart (1967) and Dillard (1972) who bring into discussion the hierarchical division of slaves into *house servants* and *field hands*. They argue that house servants would have spoken a variety closer to the English superstrate (i.e. acrolect), while field hands would have used a more basilectal variety. Stewart (1967: 26) writes that:

Over the last two centuries, the proportion of American Negroes who speak a perfectly standard variety of English has risen from a small group of privileged house slaves and free Negroes to persons numbering in the hundreds of thousands, and perhaps even millions. Yet there is still a sizable number of American Negroes – undoubtedly larger than the number of standard-speaking Negroes – whose speech may be radically nonstandard. The nonstandard features in the speech of such persons may be due in part to the influence of the nonstandard dialects of Whites with whom they or their ancestors have come into contact, but they may also be due to the survival of creolisms from the older Negro field hand speech of the plantations.

We can, therefore, assume that house servants who came into very close contact with Europeans would have used the regional superstrate, while field hands, in the absence of close contact with the Europeans, would have employed a more basilectal creole variety.

Following the same train of thought as Mufwene, Winford (1997) considers that Gullah most probably emerged in South Carolina somewhere between 1720 and 1775, because conditions in South Carolina would have favoured Africans acquiring a variant of the dialects used by their settlers or masters. Weldon (2004: 393) traces Barbadian Creole (used in the 17th century), Jamaican Creole and Sranan (Cassidy 1980) as the sources of Gullah. She based her claim on the fact that South Carolina, just like Jamaica and Surinam, was colonized by Barbadian settlers.

2. Phonological features of Gullah

This section briefly mentions the phonological features found in Gullah to serve as basis for a comparison with the ones used by Edgar Allan Poe in his short story *The Gold-Bug*.

In what follows, we will highlight the phonetic realizations of vowels and consonants in Gullah, as they are presented in Weldon (2004: 395-403):

Table 1. Gullah vowels (from Weldon 2004: 395)

KIT	ɪ ~ ɿ	GOOSE	u
DRESS	ɛ ~ ɜ	PRICE	ɪə ~ ɪə
TRAP	æ ~ a	CHOICE	ɪə ~ ɪə ~ ɪə
LOT	ɑ ~ ə	MOUTH	ʊə ~ ʊə
STRUT	ʌ	NEAR	ɛɪ ~ ɪ
FOOT	ʊ	SQUARE	ɛə
BATH	æ ~ ə	START	ə
CLOTH	o	NORTH	ɔ̄
NURSE	ə ~ ʌ	FORCE	ə
FLEECE	ɪ	CURE	jə
FACE	e	happY	i ~ ɿ
PALM	æ ~ ə	lettER	ɜ ~ ə
THOUGHT	ə ~ ə	horsES	ɪ
GOAT	o	commA	ə ~ ə
GOAL	o ~ əə		

For these phonetic realizations of Gullah vowels, Weldon (2004) relied on the pronunciations provided by an elderly African-American female basket maker from Mount Pleasant, South Carolina, as well as on observations made by Turner (1971). As far as consonants are concerned, Weldon (2004) provide the following description:

(i) Stops

Voiceless stops [p], [t], and [k] in Gullah are usually unaspirated at the beginning of stressed syllables, in contrast to Standard American English pronunciation. Gullah speakers also exhibit use of consonant cluster reduction, where the word-final stop in a consonant cluster is deleted.

(ii) Fricatives

Turner (1971: 128) writes that, in Gullah, the interdental fricatives [ð] and [θ] are replaced by [d] and [t], in words like *this*, *brother*, *month*, *think*. This process is still going on in present-day Gullah in words like *thought*, *the*, *than*, *then*.

(iii) Approximants

Turner (1971: 126) argues that [r] occurs only before vowels and never finally or before consonants. It appears to be a tendency towards a non-rhotic pronunciation.

3. Morphosyntactic features of Gullah

As far as the morphosyntactic features found in Gullah, we will only refer to the verb phrase, i.e. ways in which tense, aspect and mood are marked, negation, and nouns. For these features, we rely on the data presented in Mufwene (2004):

3.1 Tense, mood and aspect

Let us consider the following examples:

(1) a. Deh must be put um deh.
 ‘They must have put it there.’
 b. Must be deh put um deh.
 ‘They must have put it there.’

(Mufwene 2004: 365)

In Gullah, mood is expressed through modal verbs. For instance, the modal verb *can* is usually pronounced as [kin]. In the past tense, the forms are *could*, *couldn’t*, or *coulda*. The modal verb *must* is used just like in any other varieties of English. If used epistemically, it is usually followed by *be*, as in the examples in (1).

Mufwene (2004: 365) argues that Gullah is closer to Atlantic English creoles regarding the preverbal morphemes it combines with to mark tense and aspect. The preverbal form *bin* is used to denote anteriority, either past or past of past, depending on the context. However, it is rarely used to express past. Future tense is marked by the preverbal marker *ga* or *gwine*. As far as the use of completive *done* is concerned, its use is illustrated in (2):

(2) Uh done eat dat one (already).
 ‘I ate/have eaten that one (already).’

Noteworthy is the fact that unlike in other nonstandard English dialects, it is not always followed by a verb in the past tense or past participle.

3.2 Negation

What distinguishes Gullah from other Caribbean creoles is that it has more than one negator: *ain*, *don*, *didn’t* and *no*. Mufwene (2004: 368) writes that *ain* is usually used as a negative focus marker:

(3) a. Ain nobody ga worry wid you.
 ‘There’s nobody/There isn’t anybody that will worry with you.’
 b. Ain Sara we duh talk ‘bout; duh Faye we duh talk ‘bout.
 ‘It’s not Sara we are talking about; it’s Faye we are talking about.’

(Mufwene 2004: 368)

Just like other nonstandard varieties of English, Gullah has negative concord. *Inni* can be used as an invariant tag question marker, as in the examples below:

(4) a. Yall didn buy no clother frim town, inni?
 ‘You didn’t buy (any) clother from the city, did you?’
 b. You be cookin up all kine o’ting, inni?
 ‘You would be cooking all kinds of things, wouldn’t you?’
 ‘You’ve been cooking all kinds of things, haven’t you?’

(Mufwene 2004: 368)

3.3 The Noun Phrase

One of the peculiarities found in Gullah is the occurrence of nouns without a determiner and number suffix not only for mass reference, but also for generic or non-specific reference:

(5) a. you gwine cut it with knife?
 ‘Are you going to cut it with a knife?’
 b. all he do is chase ooman
 ‘all he does is chase women/all he did was chase women.’
 c. You ever see cat eat raw tato skin?
 ‘Have you ever seen raw tato skin?’

(Mufwene 2004: 362)

Gullah marks nominal plural by attaching the plural marker {s} to the noun. This, however, occurs in the mesolect. In the basilect, nominal plural is marked through the form *dem* in front of the noun, as in *dem cow*. This gives rise to ambiguity, as it could refer to ‘the cows’ or ‘those cows’.

4. Data collection and methodology

This analysis relies on a small corpus containing all the utterances used by Jupiter, in Edgar Allan Poe’s short-story *The Gold-Bug*. The corpus contains almost 1,500 words. All of Jupiter’s utterances have been extracted from the short-story and included in the corpus. For the quantitative analysis, we counted all the tokens, depending on the feature (phonological or morphosyntactic) under discussion and presented them in the contexts in which they appeared. For the qualitative investigation, we focused on instances of intra-speaker variation, eye-dialect and performed a sociolinguistic analysis of the results obtained. They are presented in the last part of the paper.

5. Phonological and morphosyntactic features of Gullah in Poe’s *The Gold-Bug*

Edgar Allan Poe’s tale, *The Gold-Bug*, was published in 1843 and it tells the story of William Legrand, who “took up his residence at Sullivan’s Island, near Charleston,

South Carolina”¹ (GB, 5) and who was bitten by a gold-coloured bug he found on one of his expeditions. His servant, Jupiter believes that his *Massa* has gone insane and rushes to Legrand’s friend, whose name is not revealed, to beseech him to visit Legrand. The servant, Jupiter is described as:

“In these excursions he [William Legrand] was usually accompanied by an old Negro, called Jupiter, who had been manumitted before the reverses of the family, but who could be induced, neither by threats nor by promises to abandon what he considered his right of attendance upon the footsteps of his young ‘Massa Will’.”

Dillard (1975) was among the first to identify Jupiter’s speech as being Gullah. Toner (1993: 4) highlights that literary critics and historians of American Black English have criticized the way in which Poe represented Gullah on three grounds:

- (i) Jupiter’s speech is inappropriate to his and Poe’s regional backgrounds;
- (ii) Poe’s attempt to produce “eye dialect” – by deliberately misspelling words that Jupiter would produce “correctly”, as in his occasional rendering of ‘knows’ as *nose* – demeans both the speaker and African-American readers of the tale, as well as creating confusing internal inconsistencies;
- (iii) the variety, if we accept it to be an attempt at Gullah, contains blatant inconsistencies when compared with Gullah vocabularies.

Taking these things into consideration, we will analyze Jupiter’s speech and see whether we can identify features, both phonological and morphosyntactic, that are associated with Gullah.

5.1 Phonological features

Poe’s rendition of Jupiter’s speech illustrates a number of phonological features.

- (i) interdental fricative stopping:

- (6) a. ‘**Dey** aint no tin in him, Massa Will, I keep a tellin’ on you.’ (GB, 8)
- b. ‘Why, to speak **de** troof, massa...’
- c. ‘Dar! **Dat**’s it!- he neber ‘plain of notin’- but him bery sick for all **dat**.’ (GB, 12)
- d. ‘...but **den** what make him go about...’
- e. ‘Mos feerd for to venture pon **dis** limb berry far...’ (GB, 23)
- f. ‘...what I chops **de** wood **wid**.’ (GB, 25)
- g. ‘And **dis** all cum ob **de** goole-bug! **de** putty goole-bug! **de** poor...’ (GB, 33)

¹ All references to the story *The Gold-Bug* will be referred to as GB and will be given parenthetically followed by the page number.

The examples provided in (6) reveal that the interdental fricative [ð] is replaced by [d] in *dey, de, dat, den, dis, wid*, which stand for *they, the, that, then, this, with*. I wrote them in bold for emphatic purposes only. This is consistent with Turner's (1971: 128) description mentioned above in section 2.

Kurath (1972) stated that the vast majority of "Negroes" from Delmarva Peninsula, and the north-eastern corner of North Carolina pronounce the word *with* as [wif]. However, Harris (quoted in Williams 1993: 415), in his renditions of African-American speech in central Georgia, used the form *wid* 'with', suggesting the pronunciation [wid]. Ives's (1954) study (quoted in Williams 1993: 415) of Harris's renditions of African-American speech in central Georgia pinpointed that the [d] pronunciation found in words like *with* corresponds to the interdental fricative [ð], irrespective of whether it appears in word-intial, word-medial or word-final position. Among the examples provided, we find the form *wid*, which appears seven times in the speech of Jupiter. The form *with* is never used.

(ii) consonant cluster reduction:

(7) a. 'Why, **massa**, 'taint worf while for to git mad...' (GB, 12)

b. 'Yes, **Massa** Will, hear you ebber so plain.' (GB, 24)

c. 'Is de **lef** eye of de skull pon de same side as de **lef** hand side...' (GB, 25)

d. 'What **mus** do wid it?' (GB, 25)

e. 'Twas dis eye, massa – de **lef** eye – **jis** as you tell me.' (GB, 30)

The word *massa* 'master' appears very frequently in the speech of Jupiter. Interestingly, it is the only form that he uses to address his master. This is a good example of consonant cluster reduction, as well as of the fact that /r/ is dropped in syllable-final position. These two phonological features are associated with Gullah, as previously mentioned. Other examples of consonant cluster reduction include: *lef* 'left', *mus* 'must', and *jis* 'just', although in the case of *jis*, there is another change: the vowel /ʌ/ is replaced by /ɪ/ (merger of /ʌ/ and /ɪ/).

(iii) substitution of [b] for [v]

(9) a. '...ebery bit of him, inside and all, sep him wing – **neber** feel...' (GB, 8)

b. 'Why, to speak de troof, massa, him not so **berry** well...' (GB, 12)

c. '...de queerest figgurs I **ebber** did see.' (GB, 13)

d. 'Dat's more dan I know, and **debbil** take me if I don't...' (GB, 13)

- e. ‘...de debbil’s own lot of money I had to **gib** for ‘em.’ (GB, 16)
- f. ‘...what I boosed in dat **sabage** kind ob style’ (GB, 33)

Although this is not a feature that has been ascribed to Gullah, it is found in AAVE (Edwards 2004).

(iv) unstressed syllable deletion

- (10) a. ‘...he neber ‘**plain** of notin’ – but him...’ (GB, 12)
- b. ‘Ise heard ‘**bout** dem goole-bugs’ ‘**fore** dis’
- c. ‘why, ‘**cause** he talk about it in he sleep...’ (GB, 13)
- d. ‘**S’pose** I drop him down fuss, and den de limb...’ (GB, 24)

This is another phonological feature that appears quite frequently in Jupiter’s speech and it is associated with many varieties of English, among which AAVE.

(v) deletion of syllable-final /r/

- (11) a. ‘How much **fudder** is got for go?’ (GB, 22)
- b. ‘S’pose I drop him down **fuss** and den de limb...’ (GB, 24)

In the example provided in (11a) the form *fudder* ‘further’ retains the final /r/. However, the first syllable-final /r/ is deleted and the interdental fricative [ð] is replaced by [d]. In the form *fuss* ‘first’, in (11b), the postvocalic /r/ is dropped, but also final /t/, another example of reduction of word-final clusters.

(vi) velar nasal shifted to alveolar point of articulation

- (12) a. ‘Ise **getting**’ to be skeered, I tell you.’
- b. ‘I don’t think **noffin**’ about it.’ (GB, 13)

This phonological feature is very common in almost, if not all, non-standard varieties of English, so it should come as no surprise that it also appears in the speech of Jupiter. In the form *noffin* ‘nothing’, the interdental fricative /θ/, which appears in the final syllable, is shifted to [f]. This feature has been attested in AAVE, and it is also found in Cockney English.

(vii) deletion of interdental fricative

(13) ‘...lot of money I had to gib for ‘em.’
(GB, 16)

The interdental fricative [ð] is dropped, in a few cases, when it occurs in initial position. Although it has not been attested in Gullah, it does appear in several African-American dialects.

(viii) monophthongization

(14) a. ‘Why, to speak de troof, massa, him not so bery well as mought be.’
(GB, 12)
b. ‘Mought venture out leetle way pon de limb by myself, dat’s true.’
(GB, 24)

The form *mought* [ma:t] or [ma:t], for the modal ‘might’/maɪt/, appears twice in the speech of Jupiter. The form *might* does not appear at all.

5.2 Morphosyntactic features

This subsection illustrate the morphosyntactic features found in Jupiter’s speech, as rendered in Poe’s *The Gold-Bug*.

(i) present tense

Third person singular -s is omitted several times in Jupiter’s speech. Consider the following examples:

(15) a. ‘...but den what make him go about...’
b. ‘And den he keep a syphon all de time’
(GB, 13)
c. ‘He kick and he bite ebery ting what cum near him.’
d. ‘How I know? Why, ‘cause talk about it in he sleep.’
(GB, 14)
e. ‘...’tis more dan he know too.’
(GB, 16)

It is, however, once retained in the example below:

(16) ‘Keeps a syphon wid de figgurs on de slate...’
(GB, 13)

Jupiter adds -s to verbs in the first person singular, which results in a pronoun-verb discrepancy, which is also known as hypercorrection (Huber 2018: 68):

(17) a. ‘...but Ise sich a fool dat I hadn’t de heart arter all...’ (GB, 13)

b. ‘...dat’s how I nose’ (GB, 14)

c. ‘I’m gwine, Massa Will – deed I is’ (GB, 24)

d. ‘Yes, I knows dat – knows all bout dat...’

e. ‘...’tis my lef hand what I chops de wood wid.’ (GB, 25)

These are the occurrences of *-s* with first person subjects: *I is* ‘I am’, *I knows* ‘I know’, *I chops* ‘I chop’, *Ise* ‘I am’, *I nose* ‘I know’. Noteworthy is also the form *gwine*, which is attested in Gullah, used as a future tense marker, as in (18):

(18) ‘I’m gwine, Massa Will...’ (GB, 24)

(ii) past tense

The way in which Jupiter uses past tense is quite varied. He uses emphatic *do* several times, making his utterances sound exaggerated:

(19) a. ‘...de queerest figgurs I ebber did see.’

b. ‘...deuced good beating when he did come.’ (GB, 13)

c. ‘I nebber did see sich a deuced bug.’ (GB, 14)

Another past tense form that Jupiter used twice is *cotch* ‘caught’. Consider the following examples:

(20) a. ‘Massa Will catch him fuss, but had to let him go...’

b. ‘...but I catch him up in de paper and stuff a piece...’ (GB, 14)

Huber (2018: 69) writes that this form is also attested in Schneider’s (1989: 97) corpus and that, even though *cotch* is mainly associated with AAVE, it is found in other varieties as well.

At a certain point in the story, Jupiter pays a visit to the unnamed narrator to deliver a message from his master. In this part of the story, Jupiter does not mark the past tense forms. The tense is only understood from the context:

(21) a. ‘Todder day he gib me slip ‘fore de sun up...’

b. ‘Massa Will say noffin at all aint de matter wid him.’ (GB, 13)

- c. ‘What make him dream ‘bout de goole so much...’ (GB, 14)
- d. ‘Yes, massa, Jup climb any tree...’ (GB, 21)

Turner (1974: 225, quoted in Huber 2018: 68-69) notes that in Gullah, “the form of the verb used to refer to present time is frequently the same as that used in reference to the past”. This claim is also validated by the examples provided above in (21). Huber (2018: 69), on the other hand, states that the unmarked past has long been considered a feature of AAVE.

(iii) Copula absence

The copula is absent in several cases in the speech of Jupiter:

- (22) a. ‘...but him berry sick for all dat.’
- b. ‘...to speak de troof, massa, him not so berry well as mought be.’ (GB, 12)
- c. ‘Todder day he gib me slip ‘fore de sun up and was gone...’ (GB, 13)
- d. ‘Yes, massa, him dead as de door-nail...’ (GB, 23)
- e. ‘All dat done, Massa Will, mighty easy ting for to put...’ (GB, 26)

Copula is, however, used in nineteen other cases (representing around 60% of the instances). Nonetheless, these occurrences appear in nonstandard forms, such as *Ise* and *I is* ‘I am’, *you was* ‘you were’. The fact that the copula is absent in fewer cases than it is preserved is open for discussion. We could hypothesize that Poe, in his desire to render the speech of Jupiter as realistically as possible, opted for this type of intra-speaker variation.

(iv) Completive *done*

In the story *The Gold-Bug* there are three occurrences of completive *done*:

- (23) a. ‘I done pass fibe big limb, massa, pon dis side.’
- b. ‘...for sartain – done departed dis here life.’ (GB, 23)
- c. ‘...lef him head up de tree, and de crows done gobble ebery bit of...’ (GB, 25)

These forms are also attested in Schneider (1989: 121).

(v) Double negation

There are multiple instances of double negation in Jupiter’s speech.

(24) a. 'Dey aint no tin him, Massa Will...' (GB, 8)

b. '...he neber 'plain of notin'...' (GB, 12)

c. 'No, dat he aint! – he aint 'fin'd nowhar...' (GB, 13)

d. 'No, massa, dey aint bit noffin onpleasant since den...' (GB, 14)

e. 'I don't think noffin' about it – I nose it.' (GB, 15)

f. 'Why taint noffin but a skull...' (GB, 25)

Multiple negation is a feature encountered in almost all non-standard varieties of English. One of the most striking features, that is found in the speech of Jupiter, concerns the pronunciation of the word *nothing*, which is rendered in three ways: *no tin*, *notin'* and *noffin*. In the first two cases the interdental fricative [θ] is replaced by [t], a feature attested in Gullah (Williams 1993). In the third case, [θ] is replaced by [f], a variant frequently encountered in the literature on African-American speech. Williams (1993: 415), convincingly argues that the distribution of the variants of [θ] are: [f] in Virginia and North Carolina, [t] in South Carolina and Coastal Georgia, and [d] in Central Georgia. The form *ain* or *don*, which are usually found in Gullah, do not appear at all in the speech of Jupiter. The forms used are: *aint*, *don't*, *no*, *not*, 'taint. The fact that several negators are used is what distinguishes Gullah from other creoles (Mufwene, 2004).

(vi) *a*-prefixing

According to Schneider (1989: 147), *a*-prefixing occurs quite frequently in folk speech on both sides of the Atlantic. However, in the speech of Jupiter, it occurs only once, the first time he speaks in the story:

(25) 'Dey aint no tin in him, Massa Will, I keep a tellin' on you.' (GB, 8)

(vii) Pronouns

The personal pronouns *he* and *him* are usually, though not always, used instead of the possessive *his*. Consider the following examples:

(26) a. '...inside and all, sep him wing' (GB, 8)

b. '...wid he head head down and he soldiers up...' (GB, 13)

c. '...'cause he talk about it in he sleep – dat's how I nose.' (GB, 14)

d. '...stuff a piece of it in he mouth...' (GB, 14)

There are also cases in which the pronouns *he* and *him* are used instead of *it*:

(27) a. 'I nebber did see sich a deuced bug – he kick and he bite ebery ting what cum near him.'
 b. 'Massa Will catch him fuss, but had for to let him go, 'gin...'
 c. '...take hold ob him wid my finger, but I catch him up in...'

(GB, 14)

In the examples provided in (27) Jupiter refers to the bug and used the pronouns *he* and *him* instead of *it*. Huber (2018) notes that in Gullah the pronouns *he* and *him* are usually used for *it*. Noteworthy is also the use of *what* instead of *that*, as in (27a).

(vii) Questions

Questions words in content questions are fronted. Also, the auxiliary is omitted:

(28) a. 'How I know?'
 b. 'What de matter, massa?'

(GB, 14)

However, there are also cases in which the auxiliary is used:

(29) 'What is dis here pon de tree?'

(GB, 24)

This feature has also been mentioned in Turner (1949) and he reported that in Gullah questions can be marked by rising or level tone intonation.

6. Sociolinguistic variation

This section tackles the use of eye dialect, as well as instances of intra-speaker variation in the speech of Jupiter. Let us first look at the cases of intra-speaker variation:

(30) 'I don't think noffin' **about** it – I nose it. What make him dream '**bout** de goole so much, if 'taint 'cause he bit by the goole-bug? Ise heerd '**bout** dem...'

(GB, 14)

In this example the first syllable is dropped twice and retained once. Unstressed syllable deletion is associated with many non-standard varieties of English and it seems that Poe is aware of this fact. However, he astutely uses both forms (standard and non-standard) which makes his character believable. At a time when Gullah was already being influenced by contact with American English and other varieties (AAVE, for instance), Poe's rendition of it should be acknowledged. Other examples of intra-speaker variation include the pronunciation of the word 'nothing', as *no tin*, *notin'* and *noffin*, as exemplified above in section 5.2.

In trying to render in writing the orality of a dialect, writers had to rely on an orthography derived from standard language and use respellings as well as non-standard grammatical features. Shell (1993: 20) notes that there are some instances in *The Gold-Bug* where Poe uses unnecessary eye-dialect in the speech of Jupiter. Among the instances of eye-dialect found in the tale, we mention:

(31) a. truth → *troof*
 b. cypher → *syphon*
 c. scared → *skeered*
 d. mouth → *mouff*
 e. such → *sich*
 f. shoulders → *soldiers*
 g. certain → *sartain*
 h. trouble → *trubble*
 i. care → *keer*
 j. been → *bin*

Toner (1993: 4-5) highlights that a considerable number of the words used by Jupiter are not attested in an extensive glossary of Gullah terms. Words like *troof* ‘truth’, *mouff* ‘mouth’, *soldiers* ‘shoulders’ appear in different glossaries as *trute*, *shoulduh* and *mout*'. In the case of *bin* for the past participle *been*, this form appears quite consistently in Gullah (Mufwene 2001, 2004). Despite the fact that Poe has been severely criticized for the way in which he portrayed Gullah in *The Gold-Bug*, there are several factors that should be taken into consideration when analyzing Jupiter’s speech:

- (i) the aim of this work of fiction was not to provide an exact transcription of Gullah, but only to provide a flavour of it and pinpoint some of the most important features that are associated with this dialect;
- (ii) the “inconsistencies” in the way Poe rendered Gullah is what makes Jupiter a realistic character;
- (iii) too much use of Gullah would have put even the most experienced reader in difficulty and would have made the story hard to follow;
- (iv) apart from the “Slave Narratives: A Folk History of Slavery in the United States”² (which were collected during the late 1920s and 1930s) there are no early records of Gullah. There are no audio recordings from mid-19th century of Gullah so such portrayals are the only evidence available;
- (v) Of course, literary works are not always a very reliable source because the writer is not a trained linguist, but they represent the closest source as to what a particular variety (in our case, Gullah) might have sounded like.

² Often referred to as WPA Ex-Slave Narrative Collection.

7. Conclusions

This paper has looked at the way in which Edgar Allan Poe made use of Gullah in his short-story *The Gold-Bug*, to render the speech of Jupiter, an old Negro slave. Different phonological and morphosyntactic features that appear in Jupiter's speech have been presented in the contexts in which they appear. Some of these features are consistent with Gullah, while others appear in other African-American dialects. Despite the criticism that Poe received for the way in which he portrayed Gullah, this study has shown that he actually managed to offer a somewhat realistic point of view and has given readers a flavour of what Gullah "sounded" like in 1843, the year in which *The Gold-Bug* was published.

References

Avram, A. A. 2005. *On the Syllable Structure of English Pidgins and Creoles*. Bucharest: Editura Universității din București.

Bennett, J. 1908. Gullah: A Negro patois. *South Atlantic Quarterly* 7: 332-47.

Cassidy, F. G. 1980. The place of Gullah. *American Speech* 55 (1): 3-16.

Dalby, D. 1971. Communication in Africa and the New World. In W. Wolfram & N. H. Clark (eds.), *Black-White Speech Relations*, 99-138. Arlington, VA: Center for Applied Linguistics.

Dillard, J. L. 1972. *Black English: Its History and Usage in the United States*. New York: Random House.

Dillard, J. L. 1975. On the beginnings of Black English in the New World. In P. A. Lueisdorff, (ed.), *Linguistic Perspectives on Black English*, 29-44. Regensburg: H. Carl.

Dunn, E. F. 1976. The black-southern white dialect controversy: Who did what to whom? In D. S. Harrison & T. Trabasso (eds.), *Black English: A Seminar*, 105-22. Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.

Edwards, W. F. 2004. African American Vernacular English: Phonology. In B. Kortmann, K. Burridge, R. Mesthrie, E. W. Schneider & C. Upton (eds.), *A Handbook of Varieties of English*, vol. 1, *Phonology*, 383-392. Berlin, New York: Mouton de Gruyter.

Huber, S. 2018. *African American Vernacular English as a Literary Dialect: A Linguistic Approach*. Munich: Herbert Utz Verlag.

Johnson, G. B. 1930. *Folk Culture on St. Helena Island*. Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press.

Jones-Jackson, P. A. 1983. Contemporary Gullah speech: Some persistent linguistic features. *Journal of Black Studies* 13 (3): 289-303.

Krapp, G. P. 1924. The English of the Negro. *The American Mercury* 2: 190-195.

Kurath, H. 1972. *Studies in Area Linguistics*. Bloomington, IN: University of Indiana Press.

Mufwene, S. S. 1997. Gullah's development: Myth and sociohistorical evidence. In C. Bernstein, R. Sabino & T. Nunally. (eds.), *Language Variety in the South Revisited*, 113-122. Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press.

Mufwene, S. S. 2001. What is African-American English? In S. Lanehart (ed.), *Sociocultural and Historical Contexts of African-American Vernacular English*, 21-51. Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins.

Mufwene, S. S. 2004. Gullah: Morphology and syntax. In B. Kortmann, K. Burridge, R. Mesthrie, E. W. Schneider & C. Upton (eds.), *A Handbook of Varieties of English*, vol. 2, *Morphology and Syntax*, 356-373. Berlin, New York: Mouton de Gruyter.

Poe, E. A. 1995. *Tales of Mystery and Imagination*. Bucharest: Prietenii Cărții.

Schneider, E. W. 1989. *American Earlier Black English: Morphological and Syntactic Variables*. Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama Press.

Shell, M. 1993. *Money, Language and Thought. Literary and Philosophic Economies from the Medieval to the Modern Era*. Baltimore and London: The John Hopkins University Press.

Stewart, W. 1967. Sociolinguistic factors in the history of American Negro dialects. *The Florida FL Reporter* 5 (2): 11, 22, 24, 26, 28.

Toner, J. D. 1993. The "remarkable effect" of "silly words": Dialect and signature in "The Gold-Bug". *Arizona Quarterly: A Journal of American Literature, Culture, and Theory* 49 (1): 1-20.

Turner, L. D. 1949. *Africanisms in the Gullah Dialect*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago.

Turner, L. D. 1971. Notes on the sounds and vocabulary of Gullah. In J. Williamson & V. Burke (eds.), *A Various Language*, 121-135. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.

van Sertima, I. 1976. My Gullah brother and I: Exploration into a community's language and myth through its oral tradition. In D. S. Harrison & T. Trabasso (eds.), *Black English: A Seminar*, 123-46. Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.

Weldon, T. L. 2004. Gullah: Phonology. In B. Kortmann, K. Burridge, R. Mesthrie, E. W. Schneider & C. Upton (eds.), *A Handbook of Varieties of English*, vol. 1, *Phonology*, 393-406. Berlin, New York: Mouton de Gruyter.

Weldon, T. L. & Moody, S. 2015. The place of Gullah in the African American linguistic continuum. In S. Lanehart (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of African American Language*, 163-180. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press.

Williams, S. W. 1993. Substantive Africanisms at the end of the African linguistic diaspora. In S. S. Mufwene & N. Condon (eds.), *Africanisms in Afro-American Language Varieties*, 406-22. Athens and London: The University of Georgia Press.

Winford, D. 1997. On the origins of African American Vernacular English: A creolist perspective. Part 1: Sociohistorical background. *Diachronica* 14 (2): 305-44.